

Methodology

A professional reconnaissance team visited the City of Fredericksburg and the Counties of Spotsylvania and Stafford, at the request of the request of Fredericksburg Area Tourism. The dates of site visitation included July 20, August 18-21, and October 6-10, 2000.

The goal of the Reconnaissance Team was to experience the City of Fredericksburg and the Counties of Spotsylvania and Stafford from the eyes of the visitor. Therefore the team made all of its schedules and arrangements using the tourism marketing materials made available by Fredericksburg Area Tourism, the Virginia State Visitors Guide, the Virginia State Welcome Centers, various regional materials and the Internet sites for both the state and Fredericksburg Area Tourism. Attractions listed in these materials were located and visited. The team also explored restaurants, shopping and lodging where possible. The area was seen in the best possible conditions, as the weather was seasonable throughout the visits.

Dr, Larry Gustke, Ph.D., N.C. State University developed the professional method of selection, evaluation and analysis used in this process. The report does not follow any chronological order since we visited many areas more than once and tried to enter and exit the county from all of the possible routes used by visitors. The following is a documentation of the Reconnaissance Team's findings.

Gateways

The ancient Egyptians understood the importance of gateways. Nomadic travelers emerged from the desert and found huge avenues lined on both sides by massive golden Sphinxes leading them to huge gated entrances into the walled cities. It was impossible to arrive at the ancient Egyptian cities without having a sense of awe at the city before you.

Since most American cities have grown concentrically from a center core, the arriving visitor is usually first exposed to the industrial and manufacturing sites on the perimeter of the city. Visitors are usually forced to wind their way through a labyrinth of perimeter roads, expressways and exit ramps to find the core of a city. Along the way a clutter of signs, one larger or taller than the other, each competing for the travelers attention, tend to distract the driver and prevent all passengers in the vehicle from having a positive first impression of the unique qualities found in the city before them. Further, the dramatic proliferation of chain restaurants and retail shopping has made most suburban landscapes generic and void of unique, local architectural and cultural aspects that create a “sense of place”. Therefore, it is vital for cities that are eager to capture the traveling public to create dramatic and impressive gateways that welcome visitors to their city and create a positive first impression. A good gateway prepares the arriving visitor for the experience that will be encountered in the area.

NOTE: For the most part our team found the standard green VDOT signs at the jurisdiction borders announcing entry and leaving points throughout the numerous entranceways into the City of Fredericksburg and the Counties of Spotsylvania and Stafford were. At the majority of these gateways, we found no signage directing travelers to visitor information.

Richmond Airport

Upon arriving at the Richmond airport, a visitor finds a Richmond Information kiosk. The Fredericksburg Area Tourism brochures can be found at this location. Although there are many competing brochures at this location, we were pleased to find the brochures for the Fredericksburg area here.

Washington Dulles Airport

Upon arriving at the Washington Dulles Airport, travelers see no information regarding Fredericksburg. **Auto Rental at Dulles:** Upon asking automobile rental staff for information on Fredericksburg, they were able to indicate the City on a map, but were not familiar with any information regarding visiting Fredericksburg or the Counties of Spotsylvania and Stafford. They were aware of the battlefields in the area, but suggested we stop at Chamber or welcome center to get information.

I-95 approaching from the north (from Washington area)

Reconnaissance Report

The first thing one notices is a green VDOT sign announcing the City limits for Fredericksburg. Then, a State of Virginia Welcome Center is found near Exit 130. This is excellent. As soon as a visitor determines they have arrived in Fredericksburg and need assistance, a state welcome center is available.

I-95 approach from the south

Approaching from the south along I-95, one finds a Spotsylvania County EDC billboard with the wording "It's A Great Spot For Business." Further along, one finds several brown historic markers for battlefields, etc. We did not notice any signage welcoming visitors to Spotsylvania County, or directions to visitor information. Similarly we saw no signage for Stafford County, or directions to visitor information for Stafford County.

Highway #29 at Culpeper

Our team found good signage directing traffic to Fredericksburg along State Road #3 approaching from the west. We also noted a green VDOT County sign announcing "Enter Spotsylvania County, Leave Orange County". We also found signs along State Road #3, referring to this highway as the Germanna Highway. We did not find any signage or information directing travelers to visitor information along this route.

Gateways into Fredericksburg

I-95 To Fredericksburg

RTM was disappointed in the lack of effective gateway along I-95 for Fredericksburg. Although one clearly sees the State Welcome Center, and a large blue sign indicating directions to the Fredericksburg Visitor Center, there is nothing along this major artery that intrigues the traveler and compels visitation to Fredericksburg. With approximately 130,000 vehicles passing along I-95 daily, this is a major missed opportunity. Unfortunately, the potential tourist sees commercial areas only while driving along I-95. There is a definite need for creating a significant gateway that portrays the historic nature of this region.

Off I-95 and into Fredericksburg

Driving into Fredericksburg, one sees a number of historic homes and buildings. Also, one encounters a large sign saying "Welcome To Fredericksburg" with a number of civic logos attached to a chain link fence type background.

We found several signs directing travelers to visitor information centers, but unfortunately, there seem to be conflicting signs between the blue signs directing travelers to the Fredericksburg Visitor Center, and the brown signs directing travelers to the visitor center at one of the battlefields.

Unless a traveler knows that the *blue* signs provide direction to the Fredericksburg Information Center, and the *brown* signs direct one to the battlefield center, they will easily become confused. Also, on our first trip into Fredericksburg we managed to get lost three times attempting to find the Visitor Center. Wayfinding among all the “visual clutter” is always a challenge, especially in a town like Fredericksburg where one finds so many competing things for the eye to see and take in.

Therefore, we recommend that the Fredericksburg Visitor Center examine its signage and seek ways to make wayfinding even more “idiot proof.”

Highway #17 (approaching from Fauquier County)

We traveled this route into Stafford County. Upon entering the County, one notes the standard green VDOT signage for “Entering Stafford County, Leaving Fauquier County. We also noted a nice “Welcome To Stafford County. Established in 1664” sign. However, we saw nothing that directed travelers to visitor information sources.

Highway #1 – Jefferson Davis Highway

One finds the standard green VDOT signage reading “Leaving Prince William County, Entering Stafford County” at the gateway. Also, we found the blue sign “Welcome To Stafford County, Established in 1664.” There were no directions for visitor information. We noted that this would be the principal gateway for visitors from Quantico Marine Base to Stafford County and the Fredericksburg area.

Highway #208 (approaching from Lake Anna)

We entered Spotsylvania County from this direction and found the usual green VDOT signage announcing “Enter Spotsylvania County, Leave Louisa County.” No other signage or directions to visitor information were noted.

Highway #17 (approaching from Caroline County)

We traveled this route (a scenic drive along the Rappahannock River from the Tidewater region) into Spotsylvania County from Caroline County. Again, we did not see anything other than the County line identification sign.

Welcome / Visitor Centers

Travel research shows that a majority of travelers orient themselves to an area that they are visiting by beginning their trip at a welcome or visitors center. These information centers are usually funded by the state or local governments and are intended to provide travel and trip planning information for the traveling public. Staffing at these information centers is usually full-time with some part-time or volunteer assistance. Many local visitor centers are staffed entirely by volunteers. The traveler usually forms the all-important first impression of an area while they are in the visitor center. Visitor centers should be staffed by friendly well-informed people, who enjoy using the brochures, maps and guides in stock to help the visitor plan their stay. A visitor center is a front-line sales agency that should proactively place visitors in lodging, dining attractions and retail. This is the opportunity to make direct economic impact on an area.

I-95 Virginia Welcome Center at Fredericksburg (between Exits 133 & 130)

This is a typical looking state welcome center with restrooms, walking/picnic areas, and visitor information center. We observed during our visits that approximately 1 out of 10 people go inside the visitor information center, with the remaining 90% only stopping to use the restrooms.

Virginia once invested heavily in these Federal style welcome centers that have lovely curb appeal but lack in delivery! Upon entering the welcome center one finds the expected racks of brochures, with several tall, round brochure racks. The room has the appearance of an old 1960's era public library. This is not a good first impression for Virginia. It is drab and institutional looking. Cinderblock walls painted beige, fluorescent lights and linoleum floors.

We were disappointed to find the brochures for the Fredericksburg area in an inconvenient location for the visitor, at the back and to the left after one enters. These brochures are, however, near the help counter so they are convenient to the staff. We would prefer to see the local area brochures featured prominently for arriving visitors.

Our Reconnaissance Team experienced different levels of service at this facility. One of our team members went in, looked around for approximately 5 minutes, obviously picking up numerous brochures for the Fredericksburg area. The welcome center staffers were not busy, and even made eye contact and smiled at our team member. They were sitting behind the counter talking to one another. But there was never a word spoken to us. No offer to help. No welcome to the area.

Another team member went in, looked around for a few minutes, then asked what there was to see and do in the area. The same staffer, who had just been so passive with our other team member, was helpful and friendly. The staff member immediately mentioned Fredericksburg, and enthusiastically suggested several possible attractions and activities, including the battlefields, several museums, and shops and dining in Fredericksburg. Further, the staff person came from behind the counter and picked brochures out of the rack for us and asked if we needed hotel recommendations. Several maps and brochures were offered. She even made specific recommendations for lodging based on our expressed desire for downtown area activities.

Overall, we give this staff a better than average rating. They are promoting the Fredericksburg area. Even though they were not proactive in greeting one of the team members, they did respond very well when asked for assistance. We would prefer to find the staff greeting all visitors and offering to help plan trips.

Spotsylvania Visitor Center on I-95

Our team shopped this visitor center on a many occasions, both weekdays and weekends. On one occasion two staff persons were on duty, one male and one female. Our team member entered, looked around, and slowly worked toward the help counter. We were asked the typical "May I help you?" One should realize that although this is the expected and typical greeting, it would be far better to enthusiastically greet the visitor with a "Welcome to Spotsylvania County. Can we help you plan a great visit?"

After informing the staff person that we were there on business and were wondering what there was to see and do in the area, the staff person immediately provided a map. However, the only things suggested were the Civil War sites. When asked again what else there might be, a tour to Washington was enthusiastically recommended. We were not asked if help was needed with lodging. Also, a video was continuously playing, but there was no suggestion to watch it, or an orientation as to what the video was about. We specifically asked about restaurants, and were told there were several good ones in Fredericksburg, but the staff person would not recommend any particular one. We were given a list and repeatedly told there were a number of restaurants depending on our interest.

On a second visit to this center, our team member found another staff person on duty. Upon entering, our team member was greeted warmly and asked if help could be offered. Again, this was the "May we help you?" question rather than a more effective "Come on in and let us help you plan a great visit" type of commentary.

The staff person offered our associate a map, then opened the brochure for Fredericksburg Area Tourism and began identifying specific sites and attractions that might be of interest to our team member. Also, the staff person offered the

Spotsylvania Battlefields brochure, and again opened the brochure and engaged our shopper. Although he did not offer to help with lodging he did show where lodging was listed in the Fredericksburg Area Tourism (FAT) brochure. Overall, we would give this staff person a B+. A warm greeting, a helpful attitude and engaging the visitor in trip planning earns high marks. The only improvement we would have added is to ensure that overnight lodging is obtained.

The visitor center is very nice. It is bright and professional in appearance. The location in the back of an office park is not ideal since it is off the beaten path. However, there is very good signage leading the I-95 traveler from the exit ramp to the front door of this information center. The inside has a good layout except for the fact that it is not convenient for the staff to come from behind the counter to the brochure racks by the door. This situation means that the staff are secluded behind the counter and can't interact easily with the visitors. Overall this is a very nice facility that will need to be expanded to handle increased numbers of visitors in the future.

Fredericksburg Visitor Center

Our team visited this information center on many occasions. The on site parking and downtown location are wonderful, but this information center has outgrown its purpose. Every time we visited here we found little or no available parking and a crowd in the lobby. In fact, we observed many people walk into the doorway, see the crowd inside and turn away and leave. NOT GOOD! On one visit we found the center quite crowded on a summer Thursday afternoon around noon. Our team member looked at the brochures in the racks, and waited for a few minutes for a chance to speak to one of the staff people. All three were busy. When our time came, we asked for a parking permit (after seeing a sign indicating that one was required to park in the adjoining lot) and one was cheerfully offered. However, no other information was offered or suggested. This was a very busy place, and the staffers were being patient and friendly. When a visitor center is this busy the staffers become reactive to requests and forget to initiate opportunities to help the customer. We would have preferred to see the staff greeting visitors and proactively offering visitor information. However, while this busy we were pleased to see that they were at least smiling and cheerful.

We shopped this same visitor center on several other occasions and consistently found the staff to be friendly and cheerful. However, even at the less busy times, the staff is not very proactive in welcoming guests and offering to help plan visits. It is only natural that they were catching their breath while they had an opportunity.

RTM recommends on-going training for this staff to have them understand that they are quite good now, and could be even better if they will take the approach of enthusiastically greeting all visitors upon entry, and offering to help plan visits. Volunteers could be utilized as greeters or hosts and then the staff are still available for assistance and planning. At no time during any of our visits to the center were we asked if we needed lodging information. We suggest this staff be trained to consistently ask if this can be offered. The busy pace of this information center has forced them to become far too reactionary. Make no mistake, this group stays busy and works hard when the crowds are in town.

On one of our visits we observed a sign over the counter that said, "Pick Four". We stared at the sign and then commented to our partner, "Hey, they have the lottery here." The staff person responded that this sign referred to their one ticket for multiple attractions. That was all that was said. They made no effort to promote or sell the benefits of buying the ticket. We asked if we could see one of the tickets. The staff was very hospitable in answering our questions, but never asked that important conversion question, "Would you like to buy one?" This is the difference between being hospitable and converting the inquirer into a paying customer!

Regarding the facility of the visitor center we have some concerns. The location is great, but the facility is far from adequate. The visitor center itself is tiny and cramped. The brochures are placed in racks behind a very large counter thus preventing the visitor from browsing. This is bad. Unfortunately the small footprint of the space forces this layout. The bathrooms are in the back of the building accessed by an alley. Not good. Further, the bathrooms are tiny and cramped. They are clean and well maintained as we witnessed the cleaning person in action on two different occasions. We witnessed a handicapped person in a wheelchair trying to get into the men's room. Again, not good!

The theater and film are typical of what we see in historic areas and provide a good orientation to the history of the area. We observed regular confusion as departing guests collided head-on with guests arriving to see the film. This is a tight space that the staff has made the most of every spare inch. Overall we recommend another downtown location (walking scale) be identified to build a really nice visitor center that would provide on site parking, a great orientation and welcome to the area.

Attractions

Typically we find attractions listed in tourism promotion materials in alphabetical order. This is done to be “politically correct” and to give all attractions equal attention. Unfortunately, this is not in the best interest of the customer. The tourist wants to know the “attractors” or those things that are “must sees” while in the area. Other attractions are important to the visitor and should be identified, but should be described accurately and in context. Also, it is critical to include accurate hours of operation, street addresses (rather than mailing addresses) and cost of admission. Any other charges, such as parking fees, should also be noted. A suggested amount of time required for a visit to this attraction is an excellent feature. If the attraction is targeted at children or perhaps more appropriate for adults, it is good to include this in the description. Also, if an attraction is not open on the weekend, the attraction should probably not be included. Weekends are the busiest time in tourism and if a particular attraction is not open on weekends, those tourists who have misread the hours of operation and arrive to find a closed facility will be disappointed. Doing these things prevents customer frustration, and helps the guest facilitate a visit.

Those attractions that achieve excellence usually offer:

- Excellent signage and wayfinding to the attraction.
- An orientation for each visitor to help them understand why the attraction is worthy of their time, what they will learn, see, do and/or experience and how best to spend their time at the attraction.
- Clean and accessible rest rooms.
- Guided, narrated tours and interpretive experiences (or user-friendly self guide materials). Incorporating the senses (visual, hearing, touch, smell, taste) is important in creating an interactive experience. Static “read the plaque and look at the artifact” type museums or attractions suffer complaints from today’s demanding tourism customer.
- Benches, chairs and other resting spots where a weary traveler can pause for a moment’s rest.
- Suggestions from the attraction for other things to see and do in the area as well as lodging and dining recommendations to better help the customer plan their visit.

Chancellorsville National Military Park

One finds excellent signage directing travelers to this historic site. Upon entry to the park, we stopped at the visitor center. We were very impressed with Hank, the staff person who enthusiastically greeted us, suggested we go straight into the orientation film theater (which was just beginning) then come back out to pay and he would give us a map of the park. WOW. What a great first impression! This is a level of service we rarely encounter. Someone who puts our interests first, rather than just putting us through the routine steps of pay, sign in, and then wander through on your own. He greeted us just as we entered the door and really made us feel great! Bravo Hank!

We enjoyed the orientation film, but it is very dated. Obviously it hasn't changed in decades. It captures the essence of the historic significance of this site, but could be more entertaining. Keep in mind that the typical traveler today has over 100 channels on their television. They are accustomed to the History channel and A&E. In comparison, this film is dated.

Upon exiting the theater, we went straight back to Hank, who took our entry fee, gave us a map, and gave us a very good orientation to the park. He also suggested we buy an audio cassette so we could have the drive through the park "come alive." This guy is GREAT and we wish we could clone him for every visitor center around!

We noted that two busloads of marines were visiting the park during our visit. We were told that many military groups visit here to study the unique military tactics that were used during this historic battle.

The drive through the Chancellorsville site is lovely. It is hard to imagine looking at the scenic beauty how it must have looked during that deadly period. The audiocassette that Hank suggested helped us to better mentally visualize what the battle was like compared to this idyllic setting.

We commented to ourselves that if it were not for the audiocassette, the drive through this battlefield park would be relatively boring except for the lovely scenery. After hearing the comments from visitors to this park, we can understand how today's children who are so accustomed to interactive technology would find this experience to be tedious. Without narration, this is simply a pretty drive with some historic markers to read.

We paid \$3 per adult entry. Entry pass is good for 1 week at the battlefields. We also purchased the audiocassette for \$4.

Spotsylvania Battlefield

We also toured this battlefield during our reconnaissance. We found less traffic at this site. One finds a small, open-air visitor center with interpretive signs. Other than the small interpretive area one the rest of the site involves one driving and viewing interpretive historic markers, and some nice scenery. We found the experience to be a bit tedious, with just the drive, stop, read, drive, stop, and read scenario. We fear most tourists would find this boring. The entry fee was included with the ticket purchased at Chancellorsville.

Fredericksburg Battlefield

At this battlefield, we found another visitor center. This one looked dated and appeared to have been built in the 1960s. Upon entry we found a counter with 2 staff persons waiting to be asked questions. There was no proactive greeting or engaging of visitors by this staff. When asked questions, they responded accurately but without enthusiasm. The center includes an orientation theater with a map and automatic audio narrative and a sequenced lighting of historic sites in the park. This kind of presentation is very dated and just plain boring to most visitors. We observed many people turning around and leaving after entering the theater. They saw the map on the wall and left.

If there is an audiocassette tour, we did not see any evidence of it. The visitor center has a museum with displays of the battle behind glass partitions. We observed very bored children asking their parents if it was time to leave. Behind the visitor center we discovered a very nice book store/gift shop. A cemetery by the visitor center creates a strong impression of the gravity of history of this site.

On a drive through the park, we found few visitors. Mostly, we found local residents running and exercising in the park. We did find several carloads of families touring. The children were obviously bored. Again, this is a ride in the car, stop at the plaque, read, look at the artifact, and then drive on type of experience. We fear this is something that families will feel compelled to do, but children find this almost painfully boring. Further, the encroachment of residential development on the park dilutes the experience. It is very hard to stop alongside the road, read the sign and try to mentally picture a battle here while looking at a man washing his Buick. Additionally the trees have grown up so much that it is hard to visualize that wide-open battlefield stretching from the river.

Regarding the battlefields overall we saw nicely maintained historic sites. Very significant historic sites indeed. The interpretation has changed very little since these sites were originally arranged for visitors in the 1950's. The fact is that today's traveling public lives in an information age and are accustomed to IMAX theaters, computers, and CD-ROM technology. These lovely wooded settings are little more than a drive in the country for those who are not Civil War buffs. These battlefields deserve to have far better methods of interpretation.

Belvedere Plantation/Maize Maze/Pumpkin Patch

Belvedere Plantation is open year round with seasonal products sold, and a variety of visitor experiences offered.

Maize Maze

We found this to be a unique and compelling attraction. Although there are approximately 30 of these sites around the country, this site is very well done, and offers a unique product for this region. It is a great group and leisure visit option. We were told that 12,000 visitors attended this attraction in 1999, which was the first year. During our July visit, RTM encouraged the owner of this facility to seek newspaper coverage in Richmond and Washington. These two large feeder markets should be ripe for attracting groups to this site.

Pumpkin Patch

We visited the Pumpkin Patch on a lovely Saturday afternoon in October and found the parking lot about 1/3 full with families and groups in attendance. The owner informed us that he expected about 20,000 visitors in the month of October. For \$5 per person admission, visitors can have a hay ride to the pumpkin patch, pick their own pumpkin (charged by the pound), and participate in a wide variety of farm game type activities. We observed families with children and adults traveling without children having a wonderful time. Perhaps the thing the children seem to enjoy the most was the “fun barn” which is literally a barn full of loose hay, where kids can climb around in the hay and swing out over and jump into a hay pile! Farm animals were displayed, and there were rope ladder courses, and other activities.

Interestingly, all the activities were related to farm equipment, such as the “tractor tire climb” and things of that nature. This is simply a great way for modern children, who may never have the opportunity to visit a farm, to see and experience a farm in the most fun way possible. During our October visit, the owner told us he was receiving media coverage by newspaper and well as TV during the fall season.

Overall, this is one of the best “farm encounter” attractions we have seen. This attraction is a great asset to the Fredericksburg area and allows visitors to see, hear, touch, smell and experience a wide range of farm activities and farm products. We’re thrilled to know this is available in this area and encourage all the tourism-marketing groups to develop a close working relationship with this attraction. This, on a seasonal basis, should be one of the top attractions in this area.

We also noticed on our way out of the parking lot during our October visit, a sign saying, “Come back in May for Strawberry picking.” Another nice touch in reminding visitors that repeat visits are a good idea.

Old Salem Church

Located at the busy intersection of Highway #3 and Salem Church Road, the old Salem Church is wonderfully preserved and has a barrier of trees shielding it from the traffic and preserving the historic nature of the setting. Good directional signage helped us find our way. There is a paved parking lot that includes parking for buses. There are paths through the grass that have been well worn by many visitors who follow a circuit tour around the grounds where interpretive signage can be found.

We were pleased with the interpretive signage at this location, because it showed artist renderings of what this site looked like during the battle. There was one other couple there during our visit on a lovely sunny Sunday afternoon. We interviewed the couple and learned they had come to visit friends and relatives in the area as they do every year. However, they said this is the first time they had taken the time to visit any local sites of historic significance. They were spending the day doing all of the battlefield sites in chronological order. They were enjoying themselves and commented that they were disappointed to find so much commercial development in the midst of the historic sites, but were impressed that the community had done such a good job of preserving the actual sites.

Lake Anna Winery

We toured this winery on a lovely Sunday afternoon. Met the proprietor and had a wonderful sampling of the wines. We enjoyed ourselves so much; we bought a few cases of wine to ship home! Excellent directional signage helped us find this winery and the proprietor told us she had to pay for each sign. Well worth the money since we missed another winery in this area due to a lack of signage.

Lake Anna and Lake Anna State Park

With 13,000 acres and a good number of marinas, Lake Anna is a destination fishing attraction for a sizeable number of visitors to Spotsylvania County. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, we encountered overnight lodgers at one of the I-95 hotels who were overnighing as part of their fishing excursion.

We toured Lake Anna and noted a good number of marinas, some with Inns. Most of the marinas offered boat rentals, boat and fishing supplies, boat storage slips, etc. Some offered dry boat storage. We found camping as well.

Although this lake is approximately 20 miles from I-95, it is large enough to be a good niche market product for the region. The sunset at the lake is wowee!

This is a great location for a unique lakeside dining experience. Destination dining that would be worth an hour drive would bring the folks here!

We also toured Lake Anna State Park and found a high quality park setting with a visitor center, interpretive trails, a beach and snack bar/shower facilities, and picnic areas. Boat ramps were evident, as well as camping facilities. The park is well maintained and looks to be relatively new. This is a good asset, although we assume it attracts more local and regional residents than visitors from outside the region.

Stonewall Jackson Shrine

We toured this site on a lovely Sunday afternoon and found the site to be well interpreted, and in excellent condition. Bathroom facilities are available. One can follow the Jackson ambulatory route to this conclusion and see the house where he died. This offers appeal to the serious Civil War enthusiast.

St. George's Church

We loved the 3 Tiffany stained glass windows in this wonderful and historic site. These Tiffany windows should be of significant visitor interest, as well as the authentic and historic nature of this architecturally significant building. The church keeps its doors unlocked and we just wandered in. How nice. Docents could be available on weekends to tell the history of the church. Don't forget that most travelers are unfamiliar with the Episcopal Church and its role in America's history. We also heard that there are some famous folks buried here. There is a story to be told here!

Stonewall Jackson Ambulance Route

We drove this historic route while touring the area. This is something we feel would only appeal to the hardcore Civil War history buff. There is little interpretation of this route.

Spotsylvania Jail

We drove to this site, but could not get into the building. It is of nice drive by interest, but we would not consider this a tourist attraction.

Spotsylvania County Museum

We visited this small museum. On a summer weekend afternoon when the entire area was heavily visited, we found ourselves the only patrons at this facility. The museum is small, and the exhibits are of a static nature. Although it offers a good education about the Spotsylvania area, this attraction cannot be considered on par with the other museums in the region. Whenever we drove by the museum on our various visits it was closed.

Confederate Cemetery

We toured this historic site and found it in good condition overall. It is sad to drive though these sites and see the sheer volume of graves and realize the tragedy of the Civil War period to so many American families.

Spotsylvania Court House, Inn and District

We drove past the old Inn several times before we were sure this was the exact site. We found a woman who apparently is living at the rear of the building who told us that this was, in fact, the old Inn. We found no plaque or interpretation of the site whatsoever. Again, although this offers some interest as a drive by, it is not the type of attraction that can be promoted as equal to the other museums and attractions in the region.

We also visited the Courthouse and again had to drive by several times before we determined the one we were seeing was the one pictured in the visitor guide. The landscaping and the additions to the building did not look in person the way it looked in the brochure. Also, although it is interesting to know where the Courthouse is, we're unsure why this would be considered a tourist attraction. The first thing one sees upon entry is a metal detector. It may have great historical significance since the battle was fought here, but as it is today, it simply looks like a typical well-maintained government building with contemporary landscaping.

We understand there are plans for creating more of a "village square" environment and connecting the history of the Courthouse and battlefield area. We encourage this development. As it is now, this setting does not compel visitation and cannot justifiably be compared with the other historic sites in the region. It is a visit to a modern government complex.

NOTE: Overall, our team felt that the drive to the Spotsylvania Historic District was really not worth the trip. There is little to find other than the small museum and the drive by sites. We fear that visitors would feel misled if this were highly promoted as it is today. If interpretation were provided this could be a good history/learning experience. The actual Court House does not look like the sepia-tone pictures in the Spotsylvania County brochure. Confusing.

Historic Downtown Fredericksburg

Downtown Fredericksburg makes a GREAT and fun looking impression upon visitors, as was confirmed in numerous intercept interviews. Visitors love the animated and historic feeling to the downtown, the shops and the restaurants. There is lots of activity all day long, and every day of the week. During our numerous visits to the downtown area, we continuously found this to be the most visited area, and also continuously found visitors of all ages having an enjoyable time. In fact we observed three different festivals on one weekend. We were looking for the Greek festival and found a German "Oompah" band. Our team believes that Fredericksburg is undoubtedly one of the top attractors for the region.

The only negative comments we heard during our several visits regarded how all the shops closed at 5:00 pm and this in effect shuts down the town. Tourists **literally commented “they roll up the street promptly at 5:00 pm here.”** One needs to understand the basis for these tourist comments. The museums and attractions are open only limited hours. Tourists become frustrated because they are forced to choose whether they will see the shops, or whether they will visit the museums and attractions. Neither is open after 5:00 pm. Thus, for the tourist, their activities after 5:00 are limited.

The tourists we intercepted were thrilled with the historic “cute” downtown area. It has an authentic atmosphere. In today’s modern, typical U.S. urban setting, finding a nostalgic and authentic setting like downtown Fredericksburg is highly compelling.

Our team found it interesting that one couldn’t see the Rappahannock River from the downtown area. Even though the river is less than 2 blocks away, one simply does not see it. There is little in the downtown area that seems to connect it to the river. Perhaps more interpretation would help this.

Of interesting note, many of the shopkeepers we talked with, as well as a couple of the coffee shops/restaurants told us that the majority of the traffic and sales in their shops were attributed to local residents, not tourists. The general consensus seems to be that the revenue comes from 60% local residents vs. 40% tourists. We found this shocking since the streets were filled with so many visitors.

We found a nice looking two color brochure for the antique shops of the Historic district. This is in a directory format and should be rearranged from the perspective of the reader/potential antique buyer. Show where the shops are located on the map and reference the map in the listings so it reads like a walking tour. Don’t list the shops alphabetically or by address as this means nothing to the reader. List them by area, or type of antiques sold. Make it work for the visitor.

The “Walk Through History” series of brochures provide excellent walking tours. A few suggestions may improve these:

- Bigger typeface will benefit those over 40 years old
- Eliminate the dye cut on the cover – it is expensive and tears too easily
- Add a story about important buildings. Reading architectural details gets dull after a while. Tell the story!
- Less narrative and more bullet points will make this easier to read while walking around. It looks good on a conference room table, but try walking the street while reading the brochure.

Trolley Tour

WOW! This is perhaps one of the best guided and narrated tours of a historic area we've ever encountered! What made it so good? We learned a lot about the history and heritage of the area without being inundated with historical minutia. We learned about the area through wonderful stories about the people who inhabited these buildings and this brought the place to life for us. We were not alone. Everyone on the trolley was having a good time as well. They were engaged and reacted positively when the guide rang the bell and rang to his friends on the street. This brings life in a small town into the experience and makes people see a historical place that is even more alive and prospering as opposed to a Williamsburg type area, which is a reproduction.

This trolley tour makes Fredericksburg the real thing! Best of all, the guide reminded us frequently that this was an orientation tour only and that we should take the time to visit all the historical sites and museums that were pointed out along the way. Future promotions should feature this trolley tour as the best way to begin your Fredericksburg visit.

This is an excellent orientation to the town. Kudos to this company! On the tour we learned everything from how the Rappahannock got its name, to whom the streets were named after, to intimate insights into George Washington and other great American leaders who lived in Fredericksburg or visited here, to getting an understanding of the museums and what made them special. Every museum and historical home in Fredericksburg, as well as many of the shops, should appreciate the cross promotional efforts of this company. As we toured about later in the day we encountered many of the trolley riders in the actual historic sites and museums.

The only thing that would make this better is for it to be a "step on, step off" ride, where one can use this as a form of downtown transit as well as an orientation. That is the next recommended stage of growth for this tour. However, it must be done while maintaining the current quality of the experience. The driver has a smooth "Paul Harvey" style that made the listening part all the more pleasurable.

Hugh Mercer Apothecary Shop

This attraction surprised us. We expected a typical guided tour of the history and artifacts in a typical Colonial period apothecary. We were surprised at how much visitors enjoyed their experience! The guides are excellent. They are costumed and during the visit they are totally in character. We were especially delighted at the reaction the children had who toured this shop. They *loved* it! There's not a 10-year-old boy in the U.S. who wouldn't love to see real life leeches used to bleed customers of the apothecary in days gone by. Children and adults alike are able to see, touch, smell, and feel the wares in this shop. The way this tour engages the senses creates a most enjoyable tour.

We can't say enough good things about the attraction. It is fun, educational, and perfectly matched to the expectations visitors have of a visit to a historic area. Kudos! We talked to a family outside the facility to see how they liked the experience. The kids loved it! The same kids told us the battlefields were boring. This proves that good interpretation can make a colonial apothecary shop more interesting to a child than a battlefield! Cost was \$3 for adults.

A combined brochure represents this site along with the Mary Washington House and the Rising Sun Tavern. While the APVA owns these historic sites, as found on the back of the brochure, each should have its own brochure. This experiential historic site must be promoted effectively in a rack brochure and all area publications because the typical traveler has little or no understanding of what will be seen in an apothecary shop. This experience is currently a surprise to first time visitors because there is little promotion of the actual experience that a visitor has once inside the door. We loved, everyone we observed loved it...so promote it effectively!

Fredericksburg Area Museum

We received an excellent orientation to this museum from the hostess who took our entry fees, Bobbie Sullivan. Although this is a small facility, she did a good job providing an overall orientation. As a matter of fact, when we viewed the orientation film on the second floor, we found that Billie had already told us most of what was in the film. Bobbie's orientation was far superior to the film, because it was live and more engaging. She is a character and everyone seemed to enjoy her. The film itself was rather technical and uninspiring. We noticed a lot of fidgeting and people getting up to leave before the film was over.

The museum contains high quality artifacts and exhibits. This is far superior to most local history museums. We watched a family with small children tour the facility and followed them. The children spent only about 3 minutes in the "Dinosaur" area, but really seemed to enjoy the historic games area. Overall, we would rate this experience as fair. It is not highly interactive, and less than dynamic. The museum is making good efforts at creating interactive activities for families and should continue to do so. The Williamsburg area has mastered the art of making history entertaining and this is what is demanded by the traveling families of today.

The brochure for this museum is as professionally produced as the museum and is an accurate depiction of the experience found here. The brochure does not make mention of the family/children related activities that are available. A family with small children could read this brochure and get the impression that this is a mature adult activity only.

James Monroe Museum

A visit to this museum proved to us once again, that it is the interpretation, which makes the experience. Although there are some wonderful artifacts in this facility, they are relatively uninspiring....until one takes a tour with David, our tour guide. He made this one of the most enjoyable museum tours we've ever had. He brought the artifacts to life with enchanting stories and fascinating interpretation. This museum, with David as tour guide, is perfect for a visit to Fredericksburg. There is a world of detail, and lots of excellent "story" in this history museum.

A quick glance though the visitor guest book indicated that most visitors to this museum have a point of origin along I-95 (north and south).

David told us that the museum is building a new facility. We strongly recommend that the developers of the new facility clearly understand that it is the dynamic and "edu-tainment" quality, rather than the facility and the artifacts that makes this a great visitor experience. There are far too many boring museums in this country. Having a tour given by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide (like David) is an entirely different experience. In summary, this is a great story – but only if told in an engaging manner.

We paid \$6.40 for 2 adults (including a AAA discount).

The brochure for this museum dedicates as much space to promoting membership in the Friends of The James Monroe Museum as it does to promoting visitation to the museum itself. We highly recommend that future brochures focus on promoting visitation only and once people are at the museum they can learn about the association. The James Monroe story is fascinating and compelling. The brochure and the museum experience should be just as fascinating and compelling.

Rising Sun Tavern

Another WOW. Millie was our costumed guide, and like the apothecary shop, she was 100% in character throughout the tour. It was WONDERFUL. Again, just the kind of "edu-tainment" today's tourist's demands. This experience of visiting a tavern and Inn such as this in days gone by came to life under the guidance of Millie. Our team feels the name of this attraction is misleading. We confirmed this by asking several visitors and those who had not visited the area what they expected to find when they heard this name. They all thought it was an operating restaurant. One person even told us she "would not take her children into a bar" and thus would not be interested in this place!

Thus, we encourage the attraction to test the name and perhaps either add a tagline, or do something so that those who might not visit because they don't understand the nature of the facility will not be lost as potential customers. We paid \$4 for each adult at this attraction.

A combined brochure represents this site along with the Mary Washington House and the Hugh Mercer Apothecary Shop. While the APVA owns these historic sites, as found on the back of the brochure, each should have its own brochure. The Rising Sun Tavern is a wonderful, fun educational experience and it needs a rack card or brochure to really sell the experience. The first time visitor has to be told that this is a fun historic experience and not a bar.

Mary Washington House

We toured this house on a lovely autumn afternoon, and had a most enjoyable time. Our guide was knowledgeable and commanded attention with her fascinating delivery of commentary. We learned many fascinating stories about the era and the life of Mary Washington, who could actually be called the "first single mother" of the U.S. Great tour, and worth the trip! We started with three of us on the tour and ended with about sixteen. Our guide took it all in stride and involved everyone on the tour in her presentation. Bravo!

The house is well maintained and we loved hearing the stories, the "why's", behind the architecture, the furnishings, and the floor plan. We left with a new appreciation for this fascinating lady.

A combined brochure represents this site along with the Hugh Mercer Apothecary Shop and the Rising Sun Tavern. While the APVA owns these historic sites, as found on the back of the brochure, each should have its own brochure. Again, tell about the experience and the unique woman who was the mother of the father of our country.

Kenmore Mansion

A gorgeous site in a simply lovely setting. This is a fascinating brick residential, historic mansion. We took the guided tour and enjoyed learning about the history and features of the house. Our guide was knowledgeable and relatively enthusiastic, but having just come from the Rising Sun Tavern and the Hugh Mercer Apothecary experience, we found this to be a less than excellent tour. It simply is not as engaging as the more dynamic tour found at the APVA sites.

We enjoyed visiting the gift shop, and were appreciative of the tea and ginger cookies offered after the tour. Mostly what we saw were adults traveling without children on this tour. They seemed to enjoy the experience. The children we found on the tour were relatively bored, although the guide made several comments to the children to help make it more relevant for them. We found the stories about the “plaster man” who created the gorgeous plaster work in the house to be fascinating. The plasterwork is amazing unto itself. Overall, this is a great facility. We hope the managers of this facility will work to make it a more dynamic tour that appeals to all age groups. This is the best way to ensure the continued visitation to the historic site.

We toured the grounds and would have liked to find more interpretation of the gardens that must have once been here. It was fascinating to find that this house was once on the edge of town where it is now in a residential setting. In the museum we found a display that effectively demonstrated the original appearance of the place. The museum is most impressive. It is a very expensive facility that displays historic antique furnishings and artifacts beautifully. This facility could be redesigned as a welcome/orientation center. Visitors would begin their visit here where they would see displays and a film about Kenmore then proceed out the door to tour the house. Carter’s Grove utilizes this approach effectively. Tours would then end with a visit to the gift shop. Research at other attractions around the country has revealed that visitors don’t mind a gift shop when they are exiting an attraction or historic site but they are offended by being forced through a gift shop to buy a ticket.

We paid \$5 per adult for this tour. While in the gift shop buying our ticket we saw a sign for the group ticket to the other house museums in the area. We talked to each other about it and the cashier never mentioned it or asked if we would like to buy one. In all of our tours around the area no one attempted to sell us one of these tickets. So we never bought one! Sales of these tickets might improve if the visitor knew about them. Additionally, the merchandise in this gift shop is wonderful, but the space is small and crowded. We observed shoppers standing and waiting for a chance to enter a room while other were in the room shopping. We said many an “excuse me” while in this cramped space. We understand the challenges when working within a historic house, but the guest experience could be improved with less merchandise or more space in this shop.

The brochure for Kenmore is beautiful and accurately depicts the experience. We noticed that the beautiful photography of the plaster ceilings interferes with the name when the brochure is placed in a brochure rack. The brochure must be visually appealing in the rack to compel people to pick it up. The real story at Kenmore is the unsung Revolutionary hero, George Washington’s sister and those fabulous ceilings! This mansion was a home, a hospital, a graveyard and remains as a work of art.

Washington Avenue area

WOW. This is a fabulous setting and a great drive by tour to view grand 19th Century Victorian homes and gardens. The statues and lovely median along this street are lovely. We noted the **Mary Washington Monument, the Thomas Jefferson Religious Freedom Monument, and the Hugh Mercer Monument.**

White Oak Civil War Museum

We drove to this Stafford County museum on a Saturday morning and were impressed with the artifacts and recreation of the encampment lifestyle. This is an extremely well done, small museum that vividly captures the battle encampment experience for visitors. Our guide told us about the historic church across the street from the museum that has stood and been in constant use since the Civil War when it was used as everything from a hospital to a commissary. A small collection in the museum captures the history of several famous people who lived in the Stafford County area.

This is an excellent product, facilitated with limited funds and dedicated volunteers. Kudos! Future marketing efforts need to emphasize the size of the collection to be viewed here. Let people know that this small rural museum contains a large and impressive collection of authentic artifacts. Additional funds should be raised to continue creating exhibits like the encampment.

Chatham

We toured Chatham on a lovely autumn day, and found ourselves to be the only guests at the facility during our visit.

Owned and operated by the National Park Service, we found adequate interpretation and a clean and well-maintained facility with appropriate restroom amenities. A self-guided tour is offered. The upstairs of the estate home is now used as offices for the National Park Service.

This is a grand estate and an excellent example of pre- and post-Civil War architecture and lifestyle. It is thrilling to see rooms in which George Washington and Abraham Lincoln slept and were entertained, as well as to see the place where Clara Barton practiced her nursing mission. One learns during a tour of the place about the Civil War and the use of this site as a military encampment overlooking the Rappahannock River and downtown Fredericksburg. The interpretation adequately portrays this story. However, this remains a “read the plaque and see the site” type experience. It could be much enhanced with a more dynamic tour. We’re sure this is the type of experience that young people find rather boring, but which still appeals somewhat to adults who have grown up with this type of typical experience.

One of the most interesting items we noted was the wrought iron railing word with musical notes that portray the music to "Home Sweet Home."

We enjoyed our tour, but also feel this could be a far better attraction with improved interpretation. Again, it was hard to visualize the Civil War era view to Fredericksburg since the trees have obscured the view. Price paid: \$4/adult

George Washington Ferry Farm (Boyhood Home)

We visited this site on a lovely autumn day and found a number of visitors at the site, with about half being families and half being adults traveling without children. The wording "boyhood home" on the brown VDOT signs was a big help since the name Ferry Farm has little or no meaning for most people not from this area.

Upon paying our entrance fee, we were given a short orientation talk about the site, that it was the home of George Washington from age 6 to 19, and that the original house no longer existed, and in fact, no one is sure exactly where on the property it is. The current main building was once a boy's school. Thus, primarily this is an opportunity for visitors to see the environmental setting where George Washington lived during those childhood years, and the landscape setting in which he taught himself the skill of surveying.

Interestingly, of all the facts and features, clearly it is still the story of the chopping down of the Cherry tree that children most relate to at this site. Also, the legend of George Washington throwing a silver dollar across the Rappahannock at this site is also questionable. It is easy, however, to believe a young boy such as George Washington spent many hours throwing rocks to see if he could hit the other side of the river.

Price paid: \$2/adults.

Belmont

We noted upon entry a sign indicating that this is also a Stafford County Information Center. However, once inside, we saw nothing that indicated any other sites in the area. The banner on the roadside fence stating "1/2 price admission" made us wonder why they didn't just change the price. One of the major sites on the estate, the Stone Studio, was being renovated while we visited, and thus the entry fee was reduced from \$4/adult to \$2/adult.

There is a very nice gift shop, in which visitors are directed first. They buy their tickets in the gift shop, and are offered a 10-minute orientation film, which provides a very good interpretation of the site, as well as a good introduction to the artist and his work.

Tours are offered of the house every half hour. This information should be noted in the FAT promotional literature so that visitors can better plan their visit. The brochure however, does say to allow 60 minutes for a tour, and we found that to be accurate. The home tour is guided and narrated, and one receives a good educational experience. It is noteworthy that all the furnishings are original to the house.

Overall, this is an excellent tour. One leaves with a clear understanding of the artist and his work, as well as the lifestyle while living at Belmont. A costumed interpreter could have improved the tour as we experienced at the other house museums. During our visit we found ourselves joined by approximately 4 couples, all adults without children.

Although this is clearly not an attraction that offers great appeal for families with children, it is a good attraction for those interested in the work of Gari Melchers or fine art in general. The grounds are lovely, and the facility is in excellent condition. Price paid: \$2/adult (discounted due to renovation)

The brochure for this site is lovely. However, in a brochure rack the name "Belmont" or "Gari Melchers" means little to the traveling public. The top front 1/3 of this brochure needs to tell about the experience. The unique experience at this site is that you can see how the artist lived, where he painted and see the largest collection of his work in the original studio. That is a unique experience and should be promoted as such.

Curtis Memorial Park

This is a very nice recreational area. We found a nature trail, skateboarding courts, ball fields, swimming pool, lake, hiking trails, amphitheater, picnic area, and restroom facilities. We were impressed to find the Gauntlet Golf Club, designed by P.B. Dye. In our travels, we normally do not find golf courses of this caliber in County parks. Kudos to Stafford County for this fine facility! The vast majority of auto license plates were from Virginia, indicating that this is primarily used by local residents. Here is an opportunity for golf packaging to bring in visitors! We found it interesting to see so many local residents on what has to be one of the premier days of the season for visitation – an absolutely lovely Saturday morning in October. We did note approximately 4 auto license plates from non-Virginia locations, including a couple from Maryland, and one each from North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

Historic Falmouth

We passed through what we assume was the historic village of Falmouth, but never found any signage that would inform us as to where we were. We did ask once we got to Belmont and were told that yes, in fact, that was Falmouth. There appeared to be some interesting historic buildings, but no interpretation for visitors. A missed opportunity.

Hartwood Winery

We arrived in the middle of the day and walked in the door and were able to join a tour just beginning. There were four people on our tour, all adults. Our guide was very knowledgeable and took us through the complete process of wine making from harvesting the grapes to bottling and labeling the wine. This is a small winery and a complete process takes place in one room. We learned that this wine is available at this site and a few local stores only. Production is very limited. The tour begins and ends in an attractive tasting room and gift shop. Tours are offered free, and the wine is reasonable priced.

NOTE: We noticed that Virginia has wonderful brown state-provided directional signs with grape icons to help visitors locate wineries. Obviously, the state understands the impact these wineries have upon economic impact.

Spotted Tavern Winery

Although we saw a road sign for Spotted Tavern road, we did not find any directional signage for this winery. We missed out on this attraction, as we could not locate it. The roads in this part of the county are pretty for driving, but easy to get lost on. They all have three digit numbers instead of names.

Bicycle Trails

We were pleased to note icons for biking trails through the Stafford County area.

Aquia Episcopal Church

We saw the impressive brick gateway for this site and upon entering found the wonderful, 250 year old church. An annual bazaar was in progress, so we had lunch, and enjoyed the various activities. This is a beautiful historic church and we enjoyed a guided tour of the main church building. Again, the history of the Church of England in the colonial era and forward should be told!

Stafford County Courthouse

We drove through Stafford and Aquia, and were confused looking for the Stafford County Courthouse. We found a relatively modern looking Courthouse. Was there an older, historic Courthouse? If so, we could not locate it. Also, if that is true, we're confused as to why this modern Courthouse would be listed as a tourist attraction in the promotional literature. The map in the FAT visitor guide shows the icon for this attraction on the opposite side of the road. Therefore, we may have not found the correct site, but nothing else seemed evident.

Riverside Dinner Theater

We visited this obviously new dinner theater and were thrilled to find such a high quality experience!

Signage is an issue for this attraction. Although it is literally only a few feet from I-95, there is nothing in the way of signage leading visitors to this attraction. Also, the theater's setting is a little odd in that it is located in an industrial park. There is no signage for the industrial park on Highway #17. The theater signage once one turns off Highway #17 is included in the signage for the office park, and it is a little difficult to realize there is a theater here. Also, the FAT visitor guide says the theater is at I-95 and Highway #17. This is clearly a location, and not directions to the theater. We're sure wayfinding for this facility is an issue.

When one arrives at the dinner theater location, it is modern with plentiful parking. Upon entry one finds a nice box office in the lobby, which was efficiently prepared for our visit, having already charged our credit card upon reservation, and handed us our ticket. No waiting. Upon entering the beautiful and spacious inner lobby, we observed a high school reunion taking place in a private ballroom to our left. Also in the inner lobby we found a bar, coatroom, restrooms, and sitting area. The entrance to the dinner theater was on our right.

When we entered the theater, we were greeted immediately and taken to our table by a friendly and personable young lady. The tables are located on tiered levels ensuring that every seat is excellent for the show. As soon as we were seated, our waiter Mark arrived, told us of that evening's entrees and took our drink order. The salad was preset on the table and the drink arrived immediately, soon followed by a delicious plated meal. The food was hot and tasty. Throughout the meal the service was very attentive. We were impressed by the professional appearance and courteous attitude of each member of the entire staff.

The show began promptly at 8:00pm and we were impressed with the quality of the overall performance. The actors, musicians, set designers and stage crew, are all to be commended for a great show.

Our only disappointment with the evening (other than wayfinding) was in noticing that the theater was only half full. A performance and venue of this quality deserves to be sold out. This has great group tour potential and leisure packaging potential with local lodging properties.

Farmer's Market and Festivals

We toured downtown Fredericksburg on a wonderful autumn weekend and were thrilled to find a lively farmer's market at the corner of Prince Edward and George Streets, as well as a festival going on. Downtown Fredericksburg is a perfect place for festivals and events of this type. We noticed that although perhaps the tourists visiting downtown had not come there for the festivals, they were enjoying having this option when they did arrive.

Masonic Lodge

Although the visitor guide, and the sign on the building indicate this museum is open on Sunday afternoons from 1:00-4:00pm, it was not open when we visited at 3:00 on a Sunday afternoon. Thus, we were unable to get in. Also, we tried a couple of other times, but never got to the museum before it closed. We were not alone as we watched other disappointed visitors walk up and turn away.

National Bank

This facility is not open on weekends and thus cannot be considered a serious attraction for the Fredericksburg area. One must remember that weekends are "prime time" for tourism, and when we find an attraction that is not open on weekends, we assume it is used for group tours, or school tours only. This museum definitely keeps abbreviated bankers hours.

River Cruise

We called this attraction and found it only runs on Sundays out of Fredericksburg. On the particular weekend we called, it was booked for an event. Thus, if it is not accessible, we do not consider it to be an attraction for the area. Further, we called on a Sunday morning and asked about the tour. The female on the phone was very curt and said, "it's left." We then asked if there was only one tour and were told that there is just one at 1:00 pm and that it was booked for a private wedding party. We were disappointed to miss the cruise and be treated in a rude manner by the woman who answered the phone.

Central Park

We visited this large shopping area because of its excellent location along I-95, and because so many local front line workers suggested we go there for activities after 5:00pm when the downtown stores were closed. We found many tourists and locals alike in our several visits. In talking with these tourists they were there for shopping, entertainment and dining.

Reconnaissance Report

Although we encountered a good bit of controversy regarding this shopping center, we remind the three jurisdictions that visitors need to have open shops and activities to keep them busy. This center provides a much-needed service by being open in the evenings and maintaining a lively, animated environment for visitors.

Because of this, we think this is a good asset for the Fredericksburg area. Anticipated future plans of this facility for increased lodging and convention facilities will no doubt be successful because the developer is building into the concept the appropriate shopping and entertainment venues.

The majority of the controversy we encountered could be traced to the physical appearance of the center. It does not look like the Fredericksburg area. In fact, it looks out of place and garish. We find this unfortunate. If the physical appearance of the buildings more closely matched the heritage and architecture of the area, we feel there would not be as much controversy as exists now.

Regardless of the controversy, visitors enjoy this site because it answers their needs and their unmet needs for shopping and entertainment in the evening hours.

Carriage Rides

We tried on several occasions, but could never get a booking for a carriage ride. We learned that they are usually booked 100% on the weekends. Limited availability makes this less than an ideal product.

Quantico Marine Base

We toured this facility to determine if it held visitor interest, and found a noteworthy museum that includes three buildings, one each covering WWI, WWII, and the Korean Conflict. This is a very good collection of machinery, military equipment and artifacts, especially sure to please men who are fascinated by military tactics and equipment. We recommend including this in the Fredericksburg area brochure as a regional attraction. Visitors are allowed on the base without a pass, and many visitors might find a stop at this sizeable military base interesting. The museum is open Tuesday-Sunday.

Restaurants & Dining

When visiting a city we always look for the unique dining experiences that would appeal to travelers. The fact is that when in Maine most folks look for lobster, pineapples in Hawaii and TexMex in the southwest. During reconnaissance, we asked local people on the street, at attractions, and at other encounter points where to find good local food. We asked for restaurant recommendations all over the area and the dining spots mentioned most often were in downtown Fredericksburg.

Sammy T's

We have eaten at this tavern style eatery several times and always find good service and quality food. We particularly like the Brunswick stew and the chicken salad. This is a unique, historic restaurant with a great location in downtown Fredericksburg. During our several visits, this restaurant was repeatedly recommended.

Smythe's Cottage

This restaurant is cute and has a charming ambience. The food quality is good. However, we found the service to be very slow. We visited on a summer evening, and it appeared there was only one server for the entire restaurant. Visitors to the area would enjoy this restaurant, but only if the service level is acceptable. During our visit, we found almost an equal number of visitors and local residents at the facility.

La Petite Auberge

We had a wonderful lunch at the sidewalk café portion of this restaurant. Although the door squeaked annoyingly during our lunch, this is a great setting, and the food was fabulous. We feel visitors would find this a great place for a unique meal.

Ristorante Renato

We found this to be an authentic Italian restaurant with a wonderful old style setting. The food is good, and the service is excellent. The prices are quite fair, and overall, this is a good option for diners in Fredericksburg. We noted that the majority of the guests we found were older local residents, although we must note that we dined here early in the evening, when one might expect to find that type of patron.

Café DaVanzo

This restaurant was located near our hotel during one of our stays and we had a meal here. Good quality food with good service and fair prices.

Friendly's Restaurant

We breakfasted at this eatery during one of our visits and found the food, service and prices good.

Merriman's Restaurant

Another hit! We found the ambiance charming, the food delicious, and the service excellent. The location of this establishment just across from the visitor center makes this an easy recommendation for the referral. Great!

Paradise Diner

We had breakfast at this locally owned eatery and were impressed with the quality of the food and the service. Upon inquiry we were told that the owner is the chef, is there daily and that he is the reason the food and service are so good. We were told they get a large number of travelers off I-95 in addition to the strong local following. The chandeliers and statues make this the ritziest diner that we have ever encountered. This is the kind of unique local dining experience that tourists enjoy. Good local flavor.

Riverview Restaurant

We heard about this restaurant from several front line people, but were disappointed with our experience here. We visited the restaurant, and although there were few customers in the establishment, we were completely ignored. We waited for about 5 minutes, walked through the bar (where there was a bartender and one couple sitting at the bar) to the bathrooms, walked back out to the waiting area and made eye contact with a waiter in the main room. No one spoke to us, nor suggested we wait. We left. The waiter watched us drive off, and made no attempt to stop us. We regret having to give this restaurant this report, but this is exactly the way it happened.

Hard Times Café

We got lost trying to use the visitor guide to find this location. One problem with listing the restaurants by exit number in the brochure is that one does not know how far from the interstate to look. One assumes the restaurant, if listed as at a particular exit, will be there. This restaurant was actually 5 miles from the interstate. That type of information needs to be included in the brochure.

Lodging

When conducting reconnaissance in an area the team always looks for lodging that would most likely appeal to the vast majority of the traveling public. Therefore, the Reconnaissance Team selects its lodging for the Reconnaissance using the marketing materials provided by the local tourism promotion agency, the state, and brochures found along the way in racks. Once in the area, the Reconnaissance Team looks at all available lodging properties to determine the range of lodging options that are available in the area. The team also looks to see if the national chain properties are well maintained and that locally owned properties are adequately advertised and represented correctly in promotional materials. The lodging properties listed herein are those that the team used for overnight visitation while in the area.

Holiday Inn Express (Exit 118)

We stayed at this property during one of our visits and were pleased with the quality of this relatively new property. Interviewing the front desk staff we found that the majority of overnight business comes from:

- Summer business from Kings Dominion (20 minutes to the south)
- Summer business from Lake Anna (20 minutes to the southwest)
- I-95 year round, especially weekends
- Canadian travelers are increased currently due to favorable exchange rate

The staff also mentioned that other hotels own the parcels of land around them, and are waiting on a full service restaurant before building. This property feels a full service restaurant would help occupancy. Current year round occupancy is approximately 55-60%.

Hampton Inn (Exit 130)

We stayed at this property and found it to be clean, quiet, and convenient. The rooms are modern and have quality bedding and the a full range of amenities including in-room coffee makers, irons and ironing boards, hair dryers, and the usual toiletries. We were delighted to find desks with electrical outlets in convenient locations for the traveler with computers and cell phones requiring outlets. This is a very good property.

Econolodge (Exit 126)

We stayed at this property and found good beds and clean rooms. However, we did note that there was a lot of noise on a weekend night. Also, there were few outlets for plugging in the laptop computers, cell phones and other equipment that today's traveler usually has.

Holiday Inn, now the Ramada Inn (Exit 126)

One of our team members had stayed in this property during an earlier visit to the Fredericksburg area. This was a good property with clean and comfortable rooms. However, the room our team member was assigned was on the backside of the property where the truck drivers parked their rigs. No need for a wake up call when those rigs start revving up in the morning! During that trip we also noted that our room reservations were not recorded correctly. Unfortunately, this happens all too often today. A visitor makes a reservation, but unless they arrive at the property early, the type of room they reserved is often given to another visitor. This can be very frustrating for the visitor who has no control over the time of their arrival. It literally is a “first come, first served” scenario regardless of reservations.

NOTE: Additionally the reconnaissance team made shop calls to other lodging properties and located all lodging properties while in the area.